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DEPT FOR AF/S, IO/RHS (ELIZABETH WEPLER, AMY OSTERMEIER, AND DEEPA GHOSH), IO/UNP (JOHN MARIZ), DRL/MLGA (LYNN SICADE AND SYLVIA HAMMOND)

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: LESOTHO SUPPORTS RAPE RESOLUTION, AMBIVALENT ON COUNTRY-SPECIFIC AND CUBA EMBARGO RESOLUTIONS

REF: A) STATE 148527; B) STATE 147506; AND C) STATE 145641

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: On October 26, Poloff delivered reftel demarches on UN resolutions concerning rape, the Cuba embargo, and the human rights situation in Iran, Burma, Belarus, and North Korea to Lesotho's Deputy Principal Secretary of Foreign Affairs Thabang Lekhela. Mr. Lekhela was strongly supportive on the rape resolution, skeptical of country-specific Third Committee resolutions (though offering interesting insights into Lesotho's actions on human rights issues), and inconclusive about the Cuba embargo resolution. END SUMMARY.

Strong Support for Rape Resolution

12. (SBU) Regarding the U.S.-sponsored resolution against the use of rape as an instrument of state policy (ref A), Lekhela plainly stated that Lesotho's MFA would instruct their permanent representative in New York to support the resolution. He agreed with Poloff that the resolution was thematic and did not target any one nation, and that the issue was of great importance. Noting that "we want this phenomenon gone," Lekhela reiterated that Lesotho "cares about sexual offenses."

Skepticism on Country-Specific Resolutions

13. (SBU) On the subject of country-specific UN Third Committee resolutions on Iran, Burma, Belarus, and North Korea (ref C), Lekhela said that the Foreign Ministry has not yet taken a firm position. On the general topic of Third Committee country-specific resolutions, he cited skepticism about their effectiveness due to: 1) the danger of appearing "discriminatory" regarding those nations singled out; 2) the possibility that such resolutions could make subject nations "more intransigent"; and 3) the concern that oft repeated resolutions fostering no change in the human rights situations in their target nations could make the UN appear "toothless." He claimed that using friendly neighbor nations as intermediaries could be a more effective means and changing in these states.

14. (SBU) Of note, Lekhela stated that Lesotho's concern about the human rights situation in other regions had led the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to bring up the subject of human rights directly with the accredited Iranian Ambassador (resident in Pretoria). Lekhela stated that Lesotho's concern stemmed from reports of religious persecution brought to the government's attention by local members of the Baha'i faith. He noted that

the Iranian Ambassador denied the persecution of Baha'i in Iran.
Lekhela noted somewhat cryptically that Lesotho also raised its concerns about Zimbabwe "privately."

Looking at Cuba "From All Angles"

15. (SBU) With regards to the Cuba-sponsored resolution on the U.S. embargo (ref B), Lekhela stated that the Foreign Ministry would "try to look at the issue from all angles." He said that Lesotho would try to foster a full debate on the issue at the UN as part of its broader policy of global support for human rights. (NOTE: Lesotho's King and Foreign Minister are currently in Cuba and scheduled to return October 28. END NOTE.)

A Win, a Loss, a Question Mark

16. (SBU) COMMENT: Lekhela's statement that Lesotho's mission to the U.N. would be instructed to support the U.S.-sponsored rape resolution was one of the strongest promises which we have heard from Lesotho's MFA in some time. Lesotho's support for "quiet diplomacy" may pose a continuing obstacle to their backing for country-specific Third Committee initiatives. And while Poloff made a strong case for opposition to Cuba's embargo resolution, Lesotho's King and Foreign Minister likely have heard an earful of their own during their current trip to the workers' paradise.
END COMMENT.

MURPHY